

## VII.—KING CROW BULLYING TERNS.

An interesting incident was witnessed by several of us at Ferozepur on 26-2-1941, and as I have not noticed an account of such behaviour in any of the publications to which I have had access, it may be worth recording.

The scene was one of the canals which still held a few stretches of shallow water wherein a number of small fry (fish) attracted a gathering of some dozen or so River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*). Seated on a small tree on the canal bank was a King Crow (*D. macrocercus*) which, as soon as one of the Terns had made a successful plunge, gave chase and forced the latter to drop its prey which was then caught in mid-air, taken to its perch and devoured piece-meal by the King Crow, the fish being held down by the latter's feet and torn to pieces much as a Falcon does with its prey.

SIMLA,

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VIII.—PRESUMPTIVE EVIDENCE OF THE  
NIDIFICATION OF THE INDIAN CUCKOO (*CUCULUS*  
*MICROPTERUS* GOULD).

(With a plate).

Six years ago while staying at Dehra Dun I visited the late O. C. Ollenbach on several occasions when we used to talk 'Natural History'. During one of these visits our conversation turned to the question of cuckoos' eggs and he asked me if I had ever found a cuckoo's egg in the nest of a king-crow, or drongo. I had to admit that I hadn't, neither had I heard of it but I made a mental note of it.

That same year, or the next, I forget which, my friend Mr. Edwin Hotz, who is a keen naturalist, up in Simla on a bit of leave from Delhi, voluntarily told me he had seen a young cuckoo being fed by a king-crow. Here was confirmatory evidence of some member of the genus *cuculus* victimizing some of the *Dicruridae*.

Looking through the list of victims of *Cuculus canorus* and its subspecies in both the *Fauna* (2nd edition) and *Nidification* I found no mention of any of the members of the *Dicruridae* being victimized.

Now taking in order the other cuckoos, as per the '*Fauna*' we have *Cuculus optatus*, and *C. policephala* we find the eggs of both are well known, moreover the eggs of both species are considerably smaller than the egg of *C. canorus*.

Next in rotation comes *C. micropterus* Gould, the Indian Cuckoo, and here we find that except for (a) the remains of an oviduct egg obtained by La Touche which he described as 'pinkish-white marked with rich red and carmine, *very much like some eggs of the Dicruridae*, and (b) the record of a complete oviduct egg obtained by Stewart in Travancore, which is described as 'all blue, of rather a grey shade'. Finally we have Rattray's assumption (*Nidification*, vol. iii, p. 347) that blue eggs which

he found in nests of *Trochalopteron lineatum*, *Hodgsonius phœnicuroides*, *Larvioora brunnea* and *Saxicola torquata indica* all of which birds lay blue eggs pertained to *C. micropterus*. About these Stuart Baker remarks; 'They are *probably* correctly identified as those of the present bird, but in appearance are not distinguishable from those of the Common Cuckoo.' Besides this evidence we have the case of Major R. E. Skinner's collector who 'saw one of these Cuckoo's sitting on the nest of a Paradise Flycatcher, and waiting until it flew away, examined the nest and took a Cuckoo's blue egg and two eggs of the owner from it.' How this man could identify the species of cuckoo in the field except from the call of the male is beyond me. Even in the hand the identification of *C. canorus*, *C. optatus* and *C. micropterus* is difficult. The 'Water-bubbling' notes of the females of all three are practically the same.

Now for my own evidence. For the last three or four years we have been used to hearing the mellow call '*kyphul pukka*' (as we syllabalize it up here) of *C. micropterus* during April and May mostly, but occasionally in June, at elevations between 5,000 ft. and 7,000 ft., while at lower altitudes, i.e. 3,000 ft. to 4,000 ft., its call may be heard as late as September.

Personally I have not taken a nest of a king-crow (*Dicrurus longicaudatus*) for a number of years, but this year my elder son has taken two, both of which call for notice. The first was taken on May 18 and contained *five* eggs but due to an accident three of these had been broken. However, on examining the two remaining eggs it was obvious that one was a cuckoo's of some species. On the 30th he found another king-crow's nest this time containing one more or less normal egg of the rightful owner while the second egg was *exactly like the Cuckoo's egg taken on the 18th*.

Next, a young friend of ours, David Cotton, an extraordinary good field naturalist, hearing about these presumed cuckoos' eggs looked up the three clutches which he had taken this year in the same locality as the two nests above mentioned and brought two of them to me for critical examination. Here again each of these nests contained *one egg exactly like the two cuckoos' taken by my son*, and all five eggs evidently, so alike are they, laid by the same bird.

A most extraordinary feature with regard to four clutches of the king-crows' eggs is that they are pure white without a mark and slightly rough in texture as are also the Cuckoos'.

The colouring of the supposed five cuckoos' eggs is dead white ground, sparsely marked with blotches and spots of pale brick red scattered evenly all over the surface of the shell. In size they are slightly smaller than the drongos'.

At these elevations we find *Cuculus canorus* victimizing *Lanius S. erythronotus*, *saxicola t. indica*, *Enicurus maculatus* and, rarely, *Oreocorys sylvanius* and know all the various types of this cuckoo's eggs fairly well, having on three separate occasions actually witnessed it lay its egg in the nest of the Stone Chat (*S. torquata indica*). The five eggs in question are like no cuckoo's eggs previously seen by me.

